

Detroit Free Press

April 21, 2011

Thursday

MACOMB COUNTY, MICHIGAN



Macomb County's first executive, Mark Hackel, reflects on challenges ahead in a meeting Wednesday with the Free Press editorial board. Photos by MANDI WRIGHT/Detroit Free Press

HACKEL'S FIRST 100 DAYS

Macomb exec dives into transit, development, budget issues

BY CHRISTINA HALL -
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Macomb County Executive Mark Hackel said Wednesday that he would be interested in entertaining a regional tax for a regional transportation system.

Hackel's comments came during an hour-long meeting with the Free Press editorial board about his first 100 days as Macomb's first executive.

Hackel said he has talked with Detroit Mayor Dave Bing and his staff about the plans for regional light rail and the biggest problem: funding.

On April 11, the Detroit City Council approved the sale of up to \$125 million in bonds to finance the proposed M-1 light-rail project along Woodward, and approved a \$25-million grant that was part of the U.S. economic stimulus. The moves are steps toward building light rail from downtown to New Center, and ultimately to 8 Mile.

Hackel said he could support a regional bus system if it were affordable and provided service to Macomb County residents. "I could support that,

no problem," he said.

Hackel said he was surprised to learn that the Detroit Department of Transportation was not part of a regional system for buses. Suburban Mobility Authority for Regional Transportation (SMART) serves communities in Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties.

The Macomb Township Democrat said he also has talked with Oakland County Executive L. Brooks Patterson about cross-promoting the Woodward Dream Cruise and the air show at Selfridge Air National Guard Base in Harrison Township, both of which are scheduled for Aug. 20, as a "wings and wheels weekend."

Hackel's other ideas included possibly expanding the official Dream Cruise from Woodward to 8 Mile to Gratiot and back, and into a two-day event. There are at least two cruises planned on Gratiot this year, one on June 18 and another Aug. 7.

Hackel said he plans to hold his second meeting Monday with Macomb's state legislators to discuss county issues. He continues to work on an organization plan that he needs to submit to

Macomb County commissioners within 180 days of taking office, which may include efficiencies to help erase a \$13.5-million deficit in this year's budget. The county is anticipating picking up about \$4 million after learning property values dropped less than projected in the last year.

Hackel also continues to promote the defense industry and water initiatives he previously announced. He wants to make Macomb the defense capital of the world and promote the industries along Van Dyke and Mound in Warren and Sterling Heights.

"I don't have the exact plan on how this will happen," he said, but he has a planner in the county's planning and economic development department whose job is to promote and enhance the defense industry initiative.

His water initiative includes improving water quality and water access to the Clinton River, and making the river and Lake St. Clair destination locations. If a casino were to come to the county, he said, he would like to see it somewhere along the water. He also is interested in the county having a freshwater aquarium.



BOLSTERING MACOMB COUNTY'S DEFENSE INDUSTRY: A county planner is working to boost his initiative, Hackel says.



DREAM CRUISE AND SELFRIDGE AIR SHOW: Hackel has talked to Oakland County about promoting a "wings and wheels weekend."